

Glyphosate is not the reason for Chronic Kidney Disease: CropLife Sri Lanka

By D.K. CHAMINDA PERERA

CROPLIFE Sri Lanka represents the crop protection industry in Sri Lanka and our membership consists of 28 companies that import and market crop protection products. CropLife Sri Lanka is a full member of CropLife Asia, which is one of the six regional associations of Crop Life international.

In view of the recent news item with regard to agrochemicals, the essence of which is given below, CropLife Sri Lanka wishes to make a statement to the general public in order to present facts.

The news items which appeared in several electronic and print media read as follows (essence of the news item): “Even though glyphosate was banned, which was found to be directly linked with Agricultural Chronic Kidney Disease, some companies in Sri Lanka have now imported an agrochemical called glufosinate which is 15 times more toxic than glyphosate.”

As a responsible industry we wish to respond to same in the following manner (statements A-D).

Statement A: “Glyphosate which was found to be directly linked to Agricultural CKD”

This is absolutely incorrect. At the International Expert Consultation of Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown Etiology conducted by the World Health Organization and Presidential Task Force for CKDu Prevention during 27 to 29 April, a local and international expert panel reviewed all available hypotheses. The official report concludes that there is no conclusive evidence of glyphosate being linked with Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown etiology (page 16, http://www.searo.who.int/srilanka/documents/report_international_exdert_consultation_on_ckdu.pdf).

Glyphosate is used in over 118 countries around the world over a period of 40 years and is one of the safest available herbicides. In Sri Lanka, farmers started using



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glyphosate in rice fields after year 1998 while CKDu had been reported in the early 1990s. This in itself is sufficient to disprove the theory of glyphosate being the cause of CKDu. Glyphosate is a unique innovation of plant science industry. Glyphosate inhibits a unique process of production of protein, which is available only in plants. It is not active in microorganisms, animals or human as they do not have same process.

Once exposed to environment it is rapidly broken down by soil microorganisms in to basic compounds such as carbon dioxide, water, ammonia and phosphate. It is degraded by sunlight as well.

Glyphosate-based herbicides are supported by one of the most extensive worldwide human health and environmental effects databases ever compiled for a pesticide. Safety data are available from 393 different experimental studies which confirm that glyphosate does not cause any adverse environmental issues or any ailments such as kidney diseases or cancer. Further glyphosate does not accumulate in plants

of animals over application for a long period.

Glyphosate exhibits low toxicity to humans and non-plant wildlife over both short- and long-term exposures.

Despite this strong safety profile, there is a great deal of misinformation about glyphosate; a careful examination of the various claims demonstrates that they are not supported by reproducible scientific evidence.

Statement B: “Agricultural Kidney Disease”

We also note that CKDu is now being referred to as “Agricultural Kidney Disease” by persons who are advocating a total ban of agrochemicals. Once again there is no scientific basis to refer to CKDu as Agricultural Kidney Disease. We are of the opinion that such persons who are redefining the illness are not acting in a responsible manner and we are bold enough to imply that they may be acting contrary to national interests and may have other hidden agendas. We wish to state that there is no scientific basis or empirical evi-

dence to show that CKDu is prevalent among farmers only.

Statement C: Have now imported; this product has been in Sri Lanka for more than 20 years

Glufosinate is not a new product. It has been in the market for over 20 years. It is therefore approved by the Registrar of Pesticides. It was not introduced to the market after the importation of glyphosate was suspended. Pesticides imported into Sri Lanka are strictly controlled by the Government through the Registrar of Pesticides. All chemicals imported into the country by our members are “legal imports”.

Statement D: Glufosinate is 15 times more toxic than glyphosate

This is incorrect and an absolutely ridiculous statement. There are published scientific data which clearly refute this statement and we are prepared to forward same. We are in fact

FT Quotes

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Sri Lanka remains the first and only country in the world to ban agricultural usage of glyphosate. We believe that banning of agrochemicals is an outcome of misleading, false and unscientific information and advices given to policy makers by few individuals with vested interest of weakening agricultural economy of the country

appalled by the lack of responsibility shown by the media as documentary proof should have been called for when certain individuals claimed that glufosinate is 15 times more toxic than glyphosate. The Registrar of Pesticides, the regulatory authority, has also been implicated through these irresponsible statements.

CKDu is a serious health issue in some areas of Sri Lanka, affecting a large number of individuals, and is a significant political issue. Pressure to take action has been great despite the lack of a clearly-identified cause. At this time, there is no evidence that glyphosate or any other herbicide contributes to chronic kidney failure in Sri Lanka.

Several media had reported in the past that glyphosate is banned in other countries such as Nicaragua and El-Salvador. However, we confirm that those news reports are incorrect. Sri Lanka remains the first and only country in the world to ban agricultural usage of glyphosate. We believe that banning of agrochemicals is an outcome of misleading, false and unscientific information and advice given to policymakers by few individuals with vested interest of weakening agricultural economy of the country.

In the absence of glyphosate and other weed killers, major crop sectors such as plantation crops are left out with expensive and less effective modes of weed control such as use of manual labor. Increased cost of production will in turn affect the global market competitiveness of tea. Manual weeding on the other hand is not recommended for sloppy lands as it can lead to soil erosion.

Sri Lanka was able to reach self-sufficiency in com production during past few years; however, we understand that cultivation extents have dropped drastically during Maha season of year 2015 mainly due to non-availability of an effective and economical weed killer.

If the situation continues, we feel that commercial farmers will be badly affected and might move out from agriculture, risking the food security of Sri Lanka.

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Colombo Port City: Did Ranil display an ‘ace’ in statecraft and diplomacy?

IN the run-up to the 2015 presidential election, there was a clear message by the Sirisena-Ranil camp that the Rajapaksa-initiated Port City Project would be halted and that Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had been particularly vocal about the way in which the project had been promoted and the callous manner in which the agreements had been executed. There were widespread concerns over environmental issues.

Ranil had never uttered a word against China nor against other projects being promoted by Chinese State-owned enterprises. His only gripe was about the Colombo Port City project which had regional security implications as was understood by the various pronouncements reported by Indian and international media over an ominous strategy called ‘encirclement of India’. The other issue was the granting of land on freehold basis which is unconstitutional and also an impeachable offence under 1978 Constitution.

Mahinda drove a wedge between China and Sri Lanka

Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa in an interview with South China Post (an influential newspaper read by Beijing’s policymakers), dated 12 March 2015, had made a very caustic comment on the Sri Lanka-China friendship. The response of the former President was typical of his ability to drive wedges not only among political parties but even with the



Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe

Guest Column



By Srinath Fernando

highest order of the Sangha in Sri Lanka.

He had said: “They (Maithree-Ranil) should be thankful to China for the help they extended; instead these people are treating China like a criminal. But I would urge China not to take it personally. It’s me they are after. They are only using China to get me. China should not feel hurt and stop helping Sri Lanka.” (<http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/diplomacy/article/1735379/sri-lanka-should-thank-china-not-attack-it-ex-president>).

If one goes by the real diplomacy between China and Sri Lanka at the time the Yahapalana Government came into power, this statement is intended to create a dent in our relations with China. President Sirisena once said that it was wrong to blame China but the previous regime for mismanaging the projects. Even Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe never made any statement that would damage relations but what was at issue was the manner in which Port City was initiated. It also had obvious misgivings from India as the Chinese footprint was ever-increasing under the Rajapaksa watch.

India was unhappy that Rajapaksa foreign policy had



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completely ignored the regional security concerns of India. It also ran counter to some of the provisions of the Indo-Lanka agreement which states that Sri Lanka must not engage in any manner that would threaten the national security of India. One reason India was instrumental in defeating LTTE was its acquisition of a fleet of aircrafts which was a direct threat to national security of India as well. If the LTTE had prevailed it would have even ventured into gun running between Tamil Nadu and the Wanni jungles with ease.

The Rajapaksa administration mismanaged everything after the 2009 victory against LTTE. He donned a crown and rested on the laurels that people would venerate him for 30 years and that he could stay in power comfortably.

Lack of transparency with Rajapaksa administration

India was equally suspicious over a number of agreements signed when President of China Xi Jinping visited Sri Lanka. The contents of the signed agreements had been kept under the rose. The granting of docking facility to a Chinese submarine at the Chinese

built berth sent alarm bells in Delhi. The Sunday Times (19 October 2014) had reported that Sri Lanka had granted Chinese State-owned companies operating rights to four berths at the Hambantota Port once the projects were completed. The report says there had been no tenders or prior announcements.

But former Sri Lanka Ports Authority Chairman Priyath B. Wickrama had said that the Government had agreed to such an arrangement with the Hambantota Port’s Chinese lenders as far back as 2010. The former Chairman had said that they had an understanding with China when the Government took the loan. The loan agreement had been signed with the Treasury. He also revealed that, in exchange for these operating rights, the Chinese had consented to ease loan conditions.

He went on to say that the loan was a ‘huge loan’. The Chinese Government has agreed to relax the loan conditions as well and the terms of the Phase I loan and Phase II loan were also being rearranged. These close interactions with China may have been seen by India as being manifestations of a

strategy more in line with the popular belief that there is a strategy to “encircle” India through deals with Sri Lanka which were not transparent.

Ranil’s diplomacy and statecraft

Ranil must be commended for renegotiating the entire Port City agreement and changing the name to Colombo International Financial City (CIFC), which gives a marketing boost for the project. After all, once the project has been completed, it must be marketed abroad for investors. One could therefore safely assume that Ranil’s craft of diplomacy must have gained currency with Chinese investors. The removal of clauses on freehold rights and dilution of the compensation claims are also positive outcomes of successful negotiations.

Once the Port City project was halted by the Cabinet, a sub-committee was appointed to review all contracts. President Sirisena visited China and was well-received by the Government of China. The recent visit to China by a high-powered delegation led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe,

as Prime Minister of the ‘National Government’ not as Prime Minister of a UNP Government – accompanied by Malik Samarawickrama (UNP), Dr. Sarath Amunugama (SLFP), Nimal Siripala De Silva (SLFP), Rauff Hakeem (UNP), Mangala Samaraweera (UNP) and Sajith Premadasa (UNP).

This high-level visit epitomised Sri Lanka’s convictions that it is willing to keep intact the centuries-old good relations with China. The manner in which the entire Port City project was transformed into a tripartite agreement symbolises the professionalism with which foreign policy issues are addressed. This is undeniably ‘an ace’ in the craft of diplomacy thanks to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. There may have been tacit diplomatic nod by the Government of India as without which Sri Lanka would not have ventured into renegotiating this port city project agreements.

One aspect of the foreign policy of the Rajapaksa administration was that it was bereft of professionalism as the diplomats had been handpicked on the basis of close family connections and that some of the career diplomats had been side-lined. This writer is yet to find a critique of the tripartite agreement by the Joint Opposition (JO) because the writer believes that JO too must have silently acquiesced with the merits of the entire negotiating process. After all China is a superpower and the Chinese attitude towards Sri Lanka was commendable, despite what Rajapaksa had told South China Post that China was being treated like ‘a criminal’.

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